

Washington Keeps Ransom Deal Secrets

*U.S. Officials, Red Cross
Instructed Not to Talk*

CPYRGHT

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WASHINGTON—There is still a decided aura of cloak-and-dagger diplomacy about the Cuban prisoner ransom deal.

Doors are still closed, mouths are still sealed in Washington when some aspects of the \$53,000,000 transaction come up.

Many government officials confess, under questioning, that they have been instructed not to talk. The same is true at the Red Cross.

In the semiofficial versions of what took place, inspired mostly by the Justice Department, much detail has been furnished about the government's role, working in concert with private individuals and firms.

But there is still a feeling here that there is more to be said.

ONE OFFICIAL points out that at this point no detailed information has been made public about what sort of deals—if any—may have been made by government officials with private firms to elicit their co-operation.

Everyone understands, for example, that the Justice Department is responsible for enforcement of the antitrust laws.

Some officials have private misgivings that some firms may feel that they have created "good will" with the department by contributing to the ransom fund—"good will" they may think might help

if antitrust questions arise in the future.

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THE RED CROSS late last week issued a list of 86 firms that have played a role in the ransoming, but the list failed to itemize what was given or the value of the contributions.

At least a few high officials suspect that the government itself may have made contributions to raise the \$53,000,000.

In particular, there is speculation that surplus food may have been contributed, perhaps in the form of powdered milk.

But officials of both the Justice and Agriculture departments deny this, and insist that all contributions have come from private sources. Denials are not always taken seriously in Washington these days.

Seven hundred freight carloads of powdered milk have been pledged to Castro as part of the ransom, but at the moment there has been no announcement about where it has come from.

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ONE REASON for keeping a secret of surplus food contributions might be a problem in legality.

Under the law, surplus food

munist-dominated countries — of which Castro's Cuba has been defined as one.

However, the government has given surplus food both to Poland and Yugoslavia through executive decisions in defining the meaning of "Communist-dominated."

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ANOTHER reason for keeping secrets at this point might be concern over the fate of 23 American prisoners still in Cuban jails.

Attorney James B. Donovan, the exchange negotiator, has said that he has obtained pledges from Castro regarding the 23 prisoners, but their fate is still uncertain.

Many of the private firms that have made contributions to the ransoming refuse to discuss it at all.

An official of the Kellogg Co., in Battle Creek, Mich., told The Daily News by telephone that he had been instructed to reply "No comment" to all inquiries.

There have been reports in Washington that some Kellogg stockholders are not happy with the company's contribution.

At least some other companies also have found their stockholders restive.